



Delegation for relations with the countries of Central America

DCAM_PV(2015)1015_1

MINUTES

of the meeting of 15 October 2015, 11.30-13.00
Brussels

The meeting opened at 11.35 on Thursday, 15 October 2015, with Sofia Sakorafa (Chair) presiding.

1. Adoption of the draft agenda **PE 559.462v01-00**

The Chair presented the draft agenda and submitted it for approval. The draft agenda was adopted as shown in these minutes.

2. Approval of minutes of the meeting of 17 September 2015 **PE 559.461v01-00**

The minutes of the delegation meeting of 17 September 2015 were approved without any changes.

3. Chair's announcements

The Chair opened her statement by recalling that in its meeting on 17 September the Delegation adopted the amendments to the rules of procedure for the future JPC EU-Central America, which were proposed by Costa Rica. The Chair informed the members that the decision has been transmitted to Parlacen and the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica. Parlacen informed the delegation that the final adoption of the amended rules of procedure will not take place before November due to internal elections in Parlacen scheduled for end of October.

The Chair then informed about the upcoming internal elections in Parlacen. Parlacen will vote on a new Bureau and a new President, the successor for Mr Bardales, on 27 October. According to the rotation principle, the new President will be from Nicaragua.

The Chair informed members that she has sent a letter of condolences to the President of the Guatemalan Congress, Mr. Luis Armando Rabbé Tejada on behalf of the delegation after a terrible landslide on 1 October in the municipality of El Cambray 2, Santa

Catarina Pínula, which led to the death of 280 persons and further 70 persons still missing.

The Chair informed that the EEAS will send an observers delegation to Honduras at the beginning of December 2015. This delegation will follow up the implementation of the recommendations for a reform of the electoral law, which were made by the EU elections observers mission in 2013. The mission will be again chaired by MEP Ulrike Lunacek, Vice-President of the European Parliament. The Chair stressed that this is the first time that the EU sends a follow-up mission to a country where it acted as an election observer.

The Chair recalled that also during the delegation visit in Honduras in February 2015, members scrutinised the implementation of electoral reform in meetings with our parliamentary counterparts in Honduras. At the time, the delegation reached the conclusion that some reform projects were in the legislative pipeline but no major reform measures had been yet implemented.

The Chair concluded by saying that given the great interest of the DCAM delegation in the electoral reform process in Honduras, the Chair will invite Ms Lunacek to the DCAM meeting on 15 December to report on her findings of the EU mission.

4. Exchange of views on the 4th round of negotiations between Honduras and the EU on a Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Voluntary Partnership Agreement

The Chair welcomed the delegation from Honduras, which came for the 4th round of negotiations between Honduras and the EU on a Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Voluntary Partnership Agreement. She then gave the floor to the leader of the negotiation team, Mr. José Galdámes, Minister of Environment of Honduras.

Mr Galdámes introduced his statement by noting that Honduras recently has experienced extreme climate phenomena, which led to a dry spell which affected subsistence crops and cattle crops and also Honduras' forests. He stressed that Honduras is a very vulnerable country to the effects of climate change. He noted that the project of the European Union has a high level of synergy with what Honduras' national strategy for the control of illegal logging. He then spoke about the 4th round of negotiations on the Voluntary Partnership Agreement on the Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT). He said significant progress has been achieved and highlighted that this progress was possible because the government has managed to achieve the involvement of civil society, indigenous people, the private sector and the support of the European Union. Without the cooperation of everyone this would not have been possible. 'Aim is to combat illegality in the trading of wood products. The agreement wants to promote better governance in the forest sector in order to reduce the degradation of the forests. He said that a transparent environment with transparent governance of the forest sector would also attract foreign investors. This would contribute to the reduction of poverty in the communities, where the forest helps people to meet their daily needs and has been an ecological motor. Mr Galdámes concluded, that this process is not just a simple process of engaging in wood trade. There is a need to have suitable governance, in order to have a win-win situation for all. Indiscriminate logging in the forests must be stopped, to

improve the life of the people in Honduras. At the end, the Minister thanked the EU for its hospitality and the supportive interest in the negotiations.

Augusto Cruz Asencio, Vice-President of Congress, said that Honduras is a country that has hopes. The country has taken firm and decisive steps in environment forest governance and climate change. Honduras enacted in recent years very important laws, such as the forest law, the general law on the environment, the general law on water resources, the law on water and basic hygiene services and the law on climate change. Honduras is the third country in the world to have such a law. This law on climate change has impressive features and it is the first law in the world which gives the state in general the responsibility to face the issue of climate change. All sectors of the Honduran society are involved on the issue how to deal with climate change. The delegation is here to declare to you our desire to approve the FLEGT agreement. After the conclusion of this agreement, all wood products can be purchased by the European Union with the security that they are legal from every point of view. Honduras and the EU aim to support the action plan for FLEGT. We want to achieve a satisfactory agreement for everyone that will end with the signing of the VPA. Concluding Mr Cruz Asencio thanked the chair and everyone who has received the delegation

At the beginning of her statement, Cristiana Pasca Palmer, Head of Unit at DG DEVCO, Unit C.2, Sustainable Growth and Development- Environment, ecosystems, biodiversity and wildlife, highlights the support the European Parliament has shown during the negotiations of the Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPAs) with various countries.

In January 2013, negotiations start between the EU and Honduras of a VPA on FLEGT to improve forest governance to reduce forest degradation, to promote trade in legal timber and support a transparent and inclusive national policy. Honduras has made great progress in its efforts in eliminating illegal logging by passing a new forest law in 2007 and a national forest strategy in 2010. Honduras is the first country in Central America to start negotiations of a VPA with the EU. The delegation here is a testimony on how much importance the government attaches to the process.

The timber trade between Honduras is actually small in comparison with other countries in the region. The main interest of the country lies in the governance part of the agreement. By improving the governance, Honduras wants to consolidate the legal and sustainable use of its natural resources but also takes its future in its own hands. She said she appreciates the words of the Vice-president of Congress about the dignity and hope the people of Honduras are placing in their future. Honduras will be one of the countries worst suffering through impact of climate change. The Honduran government has understood the role its forest reserves are playing in mitigating climate change effects. The trade of illegal timber will be stopped mostly through the implementation of programmes, which will lead to licenses for timber and timber products exported to Europe.

Commenting on the 4th round of negotiations 12-13 October Ms Pasca Palmer said, that the talks are advancing very positively. The European Commission strongly welcomes this progress and negotiations will advance in the next months towards hopefully concluding this agreement next year. During this round negotiations advanced on the legality definition, which outlines which legal obligation from the Honduran national legislation will be monitored in the context of the VPA, progress was also made on the mechanism for verification that will constitute the timber legality assurance system,

which again assures the legality of timber and timber products produced in Honduras and exported to Europe.

Ms Pasca Palmer underlined that the VPA with Honduras is setting a very high standard of participation both at national and local level and she congratulated the country for this particular effort. The Commission has seen different patterns with other countries, but Honduras really stands out in terms of engagement of all important stakeholders at national and local level. The Honduran delegation is a remarkable example of broad and inclusive participation. All are working together to ensure the VPA is credible and has broad support of all stakeholders which is an essential condition for this being a success in the long run. Honduras and the EU are currently looking at measures to ensure that all relevant information is made available for the public.

EU is looking forward to continuing to work with Honduras during the coming months. The 5th negotiation round is expected to take place round in 2016 in Tegucigalpa and the negotiations could be concluded during the next year: Ms Pasca Palmer reminded that the harder work starts after the conclusion of the VPA in the implementation phase.

In her statement, Vice-Chair Caterina Chinnici MEP recalled the mission the delegation has held this year and expressed her appreciation that in Honduras there is a real will to change. Ms Chinnici said that she met organisations in defence of human rights, in defence of the environment and representatives of the government during the visit. She said she was observing a real commitment to sustainable development for the country. Commenting on climate change, she said that territory can be destroyed and the environment can be harmed through human intervention. All the population, not just the government in Honduras is engaged in their efforts to manage the territory sustainably. She was happy to hear about the progress in the negotiations of the Voluntary Partnership Agreement, which aims at a sustainable governance of forests but also on ending illegal timber trade. Ms Chinnici expressed her hope that the conclusion of this agreement can be achieved soon.

Vice-Chair Gabriel Mato MEP thanked the participants for their commitment and stressed the importance of the ample involvement of the Honduran authorities - government and congress - in the process. Honduras is one of the first countries to have started negotiations on these Voluntary Partnership Agreements. Mr Mato congratulated the delegation that Honduras has been very capable to involve civil society, indigenous people and the private sector in the process. Honduras is the first country in which indigenous people are treated as a relevant and important part in this process. The purpose of this agreement is not only the preservation of the forests of Honduras but also as an element to provide economic and social dynamism, which will help to reduce poverty and inequality. This agreement is a great opportunity, for both Honduras and the EU: for the EU because it is a commitment to responsible consumption and for Honduras because it will strengthen the governance of the forest sector.

Ernest Urtasun MEP expressed also his hope that this agreement will go forward. He then commented on some statements by the representative of the Commission. First issue was the rights of environmental activists who have been fighting illegal logging: some of them have been victims of violence. Mr Urtasun asked how this agreement could support the protection of these activists. His second point was how the agreement will allow us to act against the actors and structures involved in deforestation.

Ambassador Flores Bermudez stated that eventually the implementation of this agreement will allow for protection in the sense that Mr Urtasun mentioned. The agreement provides economic possibilities for small scale wood producers. This will allow for a sustainable development, which will take place in the framework of a national consultation. Honduras is one of the most vulnerable countries for climate change. The EU and Honduras have achieved the creation of an important tool box of various legislative initiatives, FLEGT is one more addition to this tool box.

Subsequently, Mr Flores Bermudez thanked the Chair for announcing the visit of Ulrike Lunacek MEP to Honduras, as follow up mission to the electoral observers mission, which she led. The ambassador ensured that she will receive the warmest possible welcome.

The ambassador then said that Mr Urtasun touched upon a very important issue and stressed that Honduras is one of the first countries to have a national action plan for human rights. Honduras has a Ministry that is in charge of human rights, and even a special prosecutor against crime. The commitment of the government to protect defenders of human rights and defenders of environment has been noted by the press. Government has shown an enormous will in this area and a level of efficiency that is consistently improving, so that we can offer a lot of possibilities to everyone, who wishes to work on protecting human rights or protecting the environment.

Minister José Galdámes proposes that members of the delegation answer the questions posed by Mr Urtasun.

Ms Pasca Palmer commented on the question of deforestation that this is the whole heart of FLEGT PVA, which should not only ensure the legality of the timber, but the whole process should have an impact on deforestation. The role of the EU is to support the Honduran government to take the necessary reforms based on their own legal system. The difficult part will be the implementation process.

Sakorafa introduced the next round of speakers by saying that the delegation of Honduras consists of a wide range of representatives of civil society, the private sector and other organisations, to some of them she will give the floor.

Leon Misael, director of the Institute for Forest Conservation, said he was happy to meet again the delegation, after having met some of its members during their visit in Honduras in February. The fourth round of negotiations on the PVA has brought very positive results for Honduras. He reaffirmed the good will of the country and its government to achieve a good end to this agreement. It is very important to highlight the contributions of the European Union and the cooperation between the EU and Honduras. Important are the synergies of FLEGT with other programmes for climate change and budget support for forest and gets support. Honduras has developed national strategy to combat illegal logging. The FLEGT action plan will be an important part of this process. A roadmap has been established among the participants in this process to sign the agreement in July 2016 and subsequently both Parliaments will ratify the agreement.

Mejia Fausto, National Commission of Human Rights, said that the Human Rights Commission has an action plan, which is called "The Vanguard of Human Dignity". Ever since 2005 they have begun investigations in illegal logging, on what mechanisms are used and what areas are most impacted. The reports on these investigations have been

submitted to the forestry authorities and other competent authorities, such as the prosecution service and the Environment Ministry. Honduras has achieved considerable steps ahead for the governance of the forestry sector. Our participation has been important in developing several elements of this Voluntary Partnership Agreement. The Commission was involved in developing systems to ensure and achieve legality. This has been done by consulting with local people, indigenous communities, and farmers. Still more work has to be done, but important is to ensure the implementation of this agreement and the active participation of the population.

José Alemán (Indigenous Communities) said that the Indigenous Communities believe that forest governance and the legality of timber trade are a highly important issue for them. For them it is not only the illegal wood trade that matters but also the rules of law and the safety of our territory. Mr Alemán then listed 3 important issues in this process:

- 1) Legalisation of the indigenous community's titles to territory
- 2) Participation for and consultation of the interested parties
- 3) Information of parties before measures are taken

Alemán highlighted the good will they have met. They have seen that the participation of indigenous communities is welcome at a national level. They have been the most isolated and ignored people in all these processes, but now the communities see that the government has good will. They have come aboard to accompany the government in all these processes. What they are seeking is that the safety of their territory and the application of law are guaranteed.

Ms Carmen Brejas, representative of the small forest owners, said that the small scale private owners of forest land are very pleased to participate, The VPA will provide dynamism in society and economy. The small scale owners feel rather than trade it is important to guarantee legality and to strengthen organisations of small scale owners of forests. This is an opportunity to strengthen governance and governability in the country. So we can be more competitive on the local markets. Illegality has meant that small scale owners couldn't be competitive on the local market, for this reason they are very thankful to the government of Honduras for protecting competitiveness. Ms Brejas pointed out that 67% of the wood that is consumed in Honduras is coming from the forests of small scale owners.

Ms Chinnici MEP said that she appreciated that sharing between governments and all institutions and the population. It was the government which wanted to involve all citizens associations. On the economic side, it is important to safeguard competition. Legality is essential for development of any country and of any country.

The ambassador of El Salvador, Mr Edgar Hernan Varela Alas, congratulated the delegation of Honduras because he was happy to see that there are so many people from civil society and indigenous communities. This really strengthens the negotiations. Though it is a bilateral agreement with Honduras, it has also to do with the protection of the environment in all of Central America. Many activities are taking place and there is an enormous possibility to have SME, civil society and human right defenders participate. Mr Varela said that what is appearing here is well defined in the Association Agreement. There is a chapter which concerns sustainable trade and development, in particular article 289 deals specifically with the protection of forests.

5. Any other business

There was no other business.

6. Date and place of next meeting

The Chair announced that the next delegation meeting is scheduled for Thursday 10 December 2015 in Brussels, but that she is considering the possibility of a delegation meeting before that date, probably on Thursday, 19 November. Members will be informed.

The meeting closed at 13.00.

ПРИСЪСТВЕН ЛИСТ/LISTA DE ASISTENCIA/PREZENČNÍ LISTINA/DELTAGERLISTE/
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 LISTE DE PRÉSENCE/POPIS NAZOČNIH/ELENCO DI PRESENZA/APMEKLĒJUMU REGISTRŠ/DALYVIŲ
 SAŖAŠAS/ JELENLÉTI ÍV/REGÍSTRU TA' ATTENDENZA/PRESENTIELIJST/LISTA OBCENOŠCI/LISTA DE
 PRESENÇAS/ LISTĂ DE PREZENȚĂ/PREZENČNÁ LISTINA/SEZNAM
 NAVZOČIH/LĀSNĀOLOLISTA/DELTAGARLISTA

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Секретариат на политическите групи/Secretaría de los Grupos políticos/Sekretariát politických skupin/Gruppernes sekretariat/Sekretariat der Fraktionen/Fraktsioonide sekretariaat/Γραμματεία των Πολιτικών Ομάδων/Secretariats of political groups/Secrétariat des groupes politiques/Tajništva klubova zastupnika/Segreteria gruppi politici/Politisko grupu sekretariāts/Frakciju sekretoriai/Képviselőcsoportok titkársága/Segretariat gruppi politici/Fractiesecretariaten/Sekretariat Grup Politycznych/Secr. dos grupos políticos/Secretariate grupuri politice/Sekretariát politických skupin/Sekretariat političnih skupin/Poliittisten ryhmien sihteeristöt/Gruppernas sekretariat

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Кабинет на генералния секретар/Gabinete del Secretario General/Kancelář generálního tajemníka/Generalsekretærens Kabinet/Kabinett des Generalsekretärs/Peasekretäri büroo/Γραφείο Γενικού Γραμματέα/Secretary-General's Office/Cabinet du Secrétaire général/Ured glavnog tajnika/Gabinetto del Segretario generale/Generalsekretāra kabinets/Generalinio sekretoriaus kabinetas/Főtitkári hivatal/Kabinett tas-Segretarju Generali/Kabinet van de secretaris-generaal/Gabinet Sekretarza Generalnego/Gabinete do Secretário-Geral/Cabinet Secretar General/Kancelária generálneho tajomníka/Urad generalnega sekretarja/Pääsihteerin kabinetti/Generalsekreterarens kansli

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Генерална дирекция/Dirección General/Generální ředitelství/Generaldirektorat/Generaldirektion/Peadirektoaraat/Γενική Διεύθυνση/Directorate-General/Direction générale/Glavna uprava/Direzione generale/Generāldirektorāts/Generalinis direktoratas/Főigazgatóság/Direktorat Generali/Direktoraten-generaal/Dyrekcja Generalna/Direcção-Geral/Direcții Generale/Generálne riaditeľstvo/Generalni direktorat/Päaosasto/Generaldirektorat	
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- * (P) = Председател/Presidente/Předseda/Formand/Vorsitzender/Esimees/Πρόεδρος/Chair(wo)man/Président/Predsjednik/Priekšsēdētājs/Pirmininkas/Elnök/Chairman/Voorzitter/Przewodniczący/Preşedinte/Predseda/Predsednik/Puheenjohtaja/Ordförande
- (VP) = Заместник-председател/Vicepresidente/Místopředseda/Næstformand/Stellvertretender Vorsitzender/Aseesimees/Αντιπρόεδρος/Vice-Chair(wo)man/Potpredsjednik/Vice-Président/Potpredsjednik/Priekšsēdētāja vietnieks/Pirmininko pavaduotojas/Alelnök/Víci 'Chairman'/Ondervoorzitter/Wiceprzewodniczący/Vice-Présidente/Vicepreşedinte/Podpredseda/Podpredsednik/Varapuheenjohtaja/Vice ordförande
- (M) = Член/Miembro/Člen/Medlem/Mitglied/Parlamendiliige/Μέλος/Member/Membre/Član/Membro/Deputāts/Narys/Képvisező/Membru/Lid/Członek/Membro/Membru/Člen/Poslanec/Jäsen/Ledamot
- (F) = Длъжностно лице/Funcionario/Úředník/Tjenestemand/Beamter/Ametnik/Υπάλληλος/Official/Fonctionnaire/Dužnosnik/Funcionario/Ierēdnis/Pareigūnas/Tisztviselő/Ufficial/Ambtenaar/Urządник/Funcionário/Funçionar/Úradník/Uradnik/Virkamies/Tjänsteman